

Texas is close to failing on infrastructure

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By BILL HAMMOND

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The end of the school year means report cards, and the American Society of Civil Engineers recently graded our nation's infrastructure. The grades, especially those for our water and roads, will not get Texas into any honor society or win us special recognition.

To the contrary, we're dangerously close to failing.

Given the tremendous growth and population boom Texas continues to experience, the stress, strains and demands on our infrastructure are far more acute.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, half of the top 10 American cities with the largest population increases in the last 12 months are in Texas. Our state's population is now more than 26 million, and census estimates suggest we're on track to hit 40 million by 2050.

The attraction to the Lone Star State is without a doubt the strong business climate our leaders and the private sector have worked to create. Low taxes, a predictable regulatory climate and small government all spur the Texas miracle.

Yet there is no doubt that dealing with rapid growth provides many challenges. That is one of the main reasons the Texas Association of Business was a strong supporter of last year's constitutional amendment to support water infrastructure. Voters overwhelmingly approved the creation of a \$2 billion water fund, and that's a positive step toward meeting some of our future needs.

And, today, TAB is sounding another clarion call on transportation.

The Texas Department of Transportation estimates that it needs about \$5 billion more a year from the state just to meet current demands for road construction and maintenance. Amazingly, this number just maintains the current level of congestion, which is clearly not satisfactory.

There are bright spots in our state in transportation innovation. The Lone Star State is a leader in public-private partnerships, and we need more global transportation innovators to make long-discussed roads a reality sooner while also putting thousands of Texans to work.

Cintra and its parent company, Ferrovial, have helped Texas maximize limited state dollars to provide new roadways that the state otherwise could not afford. In short, thanks to these private-sector partners, the state has been able to maximize its resources eightfold, creating new jobs and boosting economic activity in Texas as a result.

In addition to leveraging the power of the private sector, there are other initiatives we should pursue. Our roadway needs are too large to overlook any viable option.

House Speaker Joe Straus proposes that the Legislature end all noneducational diversions of gas tax money away from transportation projects. I wholeheartedly agree and will work to support the speaker's initiative in 2015. Other funding mechanisms, such as increasing the state's vehicle registration fee by \$50 and dedicating a portion of the motor vehicle sales tax for road construction and maintenance, should be enacted by lawmakers next session.

We also should support additional options for TxDOT to contract with private companies to design and build nontolled highways. All of those options represent viable, meaningful policy solutions to our transportation woes.

At the state level, voters would be wise to pass this year's transportation funding initiative on the November ballot. That amendment would authorize annual disbursements from the state's oil and gas production tax collections to the State Highway Fund, transferring \$1.4 billion in the first year alone.

At the federal level, it's time for Congress to fully fund the Highway Trust Fund. The current system, which relies on the federal gas tax, is pushing states like Texas even deeper into a crisis for roadway construction and maintenance.

By working together, the public and private sectors can and must address Texas' and our nation's critical infrastructure concerns. The policy and politics of "no" isn't a solution. The time to act and to invest smartly in our future is now.

Texas Association of Business CEO Bill Hammond may be contacted through txbiz.org.

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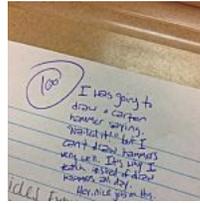
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This might not have been problem had Obama been serious about those shove lready jobs he lied about.

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-  **JulieB** 6 hours ago

We might not have had any shovel ready projects to begin with if the state hadn't kept diverting money from the fund to repair roads.

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-  **Jayme Skelton** 5 hours ago

It is amazing, is it not, that every problem from a toothache to a worldwide cataclysmic disaster can somehow be attributed to President Obama. I guess it is one of those 1,000,000,000 degrees of separation things.

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-  **Bo_garde** 3 hours ago

The term would be "whipping boy".

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-  **Eric Ward** 3 hours ago

Just another example of a guy without a shred of integrity. You know, it might have been better had Perry not denied every attempt at a revamp and SOLD our roads to an Italian company a few years ago, sending all of the toll profits to another country in a fit to balance a horribly in debt budget.

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